

Report to: **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **5 March 2012**

By: **Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Community Services**

Title of report: **Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources 2011/12**

Purpose of report: **To review Scrutiny input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) process during 2011/12.**

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**RECOMMENDATION:** The Committee is recommended to review its input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process to establish whether there are lessons for improvement for the process in future.

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## **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 There are no specific financial implications associated with this report.

## **2. Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) and scrutiny in East Sussex**

2.1 Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (ie. aligning the Council's budget setting process with service delivery plans) is now firmly established as an effective and transparent business planning process in East Sussex. The 2011/12 round began with the inclusion on the 26 July 2011 Cabinet of the State of the County 2011 report.

2.2 Scrutiny committees actively engaged in the process firstly to allow them to bring the experience they have gained through their work to bear, and secondly to help inform their future work programmes.

2.3 In September 2011 each scrutiny committee considered extracts from the *State of the County* report and made comments to Lead Members on the relevant policy steers and their contribution to the objectives of the whole Council (the County Council Promise) prior to consideration by County Council.

2.4 The scrutiny committees established scrutiny boards to act on their behalf and provide a detailed input into the RPPR process. These met in December 2011 to consider the draft Portfolio Plans and impact of proposed savings. In particular the scrutiny boards:

- Considered whether the amended Policy Steers reflected the proposed areas of budget spend for the coming year;
- Considered whether all possible efficiencies were identified; and
- Assessed the potential impact of these savings on services provided to East Sussex County Council customers.

2.5 This report aims to assist scrutiny to become more effective in future RPPR rounds and to enable consideration of the specific commentary relating to each committee.

2.6 Appendix 1 summarises the comments and recommendations made by the scrutiny committee and board during the later stages outlined above. In addition to making specific recommendations, scrutiny sought and was given assurances, on a range of related matters.

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### **3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

3.1 The Committee is recommended to review its input into the 2011/12 Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process and in particular to establish whether there are lessons for improvement for the future.

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Local Members: All

#### Background Documents

None

### Overview and Scrutiny: Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) boards 2011/12

This table is a summary of the outcomes, observations and findings of the scrutiny RPPR Board held in December 2011.

All the scrutiny boards considered draft Portfolio Plans and attempted to assess the impact of both any significant budget cuts facing the County Council over the coming years and those activities where savings are not necessarily being proposed but which account for significant use of resources. Scrutiny boards are largely supportive of the plans being put in place and the means being proposed to protect front line services as far as practicable. As a consequence of this work, they have identified new priorities for scrutiny work programmes in the coming year.

All the RPPR boards emphasised the continuing importance of presenting RPPR information in an open, clear and understandable way.

#### **Children's Services RPPR Board – 21 December 2011**

Board: Councillors Ensor (Chairman), Field, Lock and Whetstone

Lead Members: Councillor Elkin, Bennett and Belsey

Observers: Councillor Sparks and Stogdon

The proposed savings and impacts are endorsed subject to the following comments and observations:

##### Policy steer 1: Protect children and young people at risk from harm and neglect

- Against a backdrop of increasingly prolonged court processes, steps being taken to reduce court costs and delays for care proceedings and special assessments are welcome along with development of appropriate performance indicators.
- ESCC has the highest rate of referrals to social care of all our statistical neighbours with an estimated 235% increase in 2010/11 over 2008/09 figures; the causes are inadequate filtering, in particular by the police, and failing to 'hold the risk' lower down the system by other agencies and services.
- There are anomalies in the way authorities count contacts and referrals that need to be resolved; East Sussex counts some that other authorities do not.
- Actions being taken are welcome and are critical for the success of the Social Care Transformation Programme.

##### Policy Steer 2: develop resilience in families through providing early co-ordinated help for children aged 0-11 and streamlined support for families with multiple problems

- Welcomed the assurance that there is currently no intention to reduce funding to Parent Support Advisers (PSAs) either by Children's Services or schools.
- Steps being taken to ensure that procedures are being followed properly are welcome so as to ensure that the new protocols agreed between Children's Services and health partners are being implemented; for example, to ensure effective operational working between the Family Outreach Service and health visitors.

Policy steers 3 & 4: Improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers; and

Support children and young people with disabilities, and their families, including supporting young people aged 16-25 with complex special needs to make a smooth transition into adult life

- Noted the difficulties in acquiring clear evidence that respite breaks for families or carers demonstrably reduce the incidence of family breakdowns or prevent more expensive interventions 'further down the line'. Agreed that further analysis would help to provide a more targeted service in future, for example by trying to correlate changes in outcomes with policy changes on respite break provision over previous years.

Policy Steer 6: identify, challenge and, where appropriate, support those schools and settings most vulnerable to underachievement in order to maximise young people's chances of fulfilling an economically active future life.

- At first sight the increasing independence of schools, with growing numbers of academies and free schools accelerating an underlying trend, does not appear to be fully reflected within the policy overview and forward plan. The overarching assumption appears to be that the local authority (primarily through the Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service) still has a major role to play in contributing to school improvement, but more clarity is needed as to how this will be undertaken in future and how effective it will be. These factors support the proposed approach:
  - The local authority retains a statutory duty for school improvement; further clarity is awaited on how this role will be carried out both nationally and locally for academies and free schools.
  - Not all schools wish to convert to academies, especially many of the primary schools; the timescale for most of those that do is likely to be two years.
  - There remains direct local authority intervention and support in some 30% of schools that are under performing at any one time.
  - The local authority retains an important strategic role for access/admissions and special education needs (SEN).
  - Dialogue with all schools, regardless of type, is in place to establish the level of continuing support required from the local authority; most academies wish to retain partnership working with the authority.
  - It is important to retain and work towards key educational attainment targets County wide. We need to continue to send out a clear message that the County Council has high education ambitions for every child regardless of school.
- Local Members need clear notification when schools in their division fall within a category of either OFSTED or local authority concern; this currently does not appear to happen in all cases.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile shows a trend of reducing achievement at the Foundation Stage (end of reception year). Increased liaison between children's centres and primary schools to enable children's centres to target key families and to ensure smooth transition into the reception year is welcome.

Social Care Transformation Programme: outline business case

The overall approach of this programme is endorsed but greater clarity is needed about the nature of early intervention measures envisaged on the

ground. The risks associated with this programme will need very close monitoring.

Funding for this capital bid is recommended to Cabinet as the Programme has:

- been based on models that have been successful elsewhere, primarily in urban and unitary councils.
- the potential to resolve a wide range of problems and 'bottlenecks' with the current system; for example, resources currently spent assessing, and often re-assessing, family risks will be re-directed towards direct and early intervention.
- the potential to improve outcomes for families and children.